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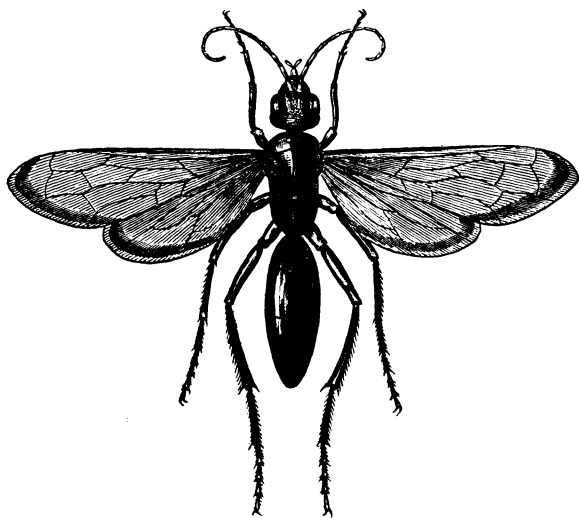
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# THE TARANTULA KILLERS OF TEXAS.

BY DR. G. LINCECUM.



The Mud Dauber, *Pompilus formosus*. From SAY.

An investigation of the extensive family of Mud Daubers would be an interesting and instructive study. It would necessarily include that of the various types of Spiders, from the great hairy *Mygale Hentzii*, down to the smallest, almost microscopic species; for nearly every type of Spiders has its special enemy among the Mud Daubers.

The large, red-winged "Tarantula Killer" (the *Pompilus formosus* of Say) is, as far as I know, the largest of the dauber group. It takes its prey by stinging, thus instantly paralyzing every limb of its victim. The effects of the introduction of its venom is as sudden as the snap of the electric spark. The wasp then drags it, going backwards to some suitable place, excavates a hole five inches deep in the earth, places its great spider in it, deposits an egg under one of its legs, near the body, and then

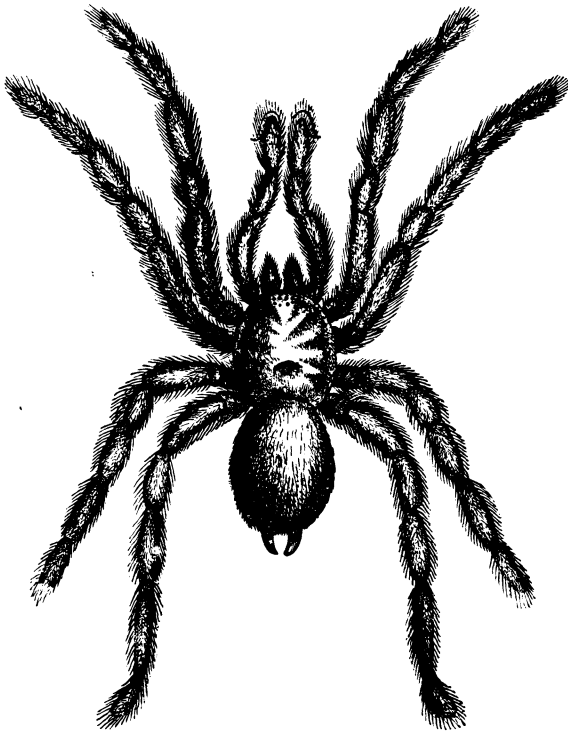
covers the hole very securely. A young Tarantula Killer will be produced from this egg, if no accident befalls it, about the first of June of the ensuing year.

This large and conspicuous insect is everywhere in Texas called the Tarantula Killer, and is over two inches in length; the head, thorax, abdomen, and long spiny legs are all black, while the wings are sometimes of a bright brown, with black spots at the tips. It is armed with a formidable sting, which it invariably uses in taking its prey. This sting does not kill the *Mygale*, but paralyzes it—suspends all animation—and in this state, in a dry place, and at the proper temperature, it is in a condition to resist decomposition a long time. The entire group of Mud Daubers possess the power of paralyzing their victims, and in that condition they store up their spiders, caterpillars, and other insects, which are to serve as food for coming generations.

The Tarantula Killer pursues several other species of the large ground spiders, but the *Mygale Hentzii*, or Tarantula, is his favorite.

I have sometimes found under shelving rocks, and other sheltered places, dauber's nests that were doubtless several years old. In some of the cells, where the egg had proved abortive, the spiders were there, still limber, with no signs of decomposition about them. They did not seem to be dead, but looked as if they could almost move their legs, and were perhaps not unconscious of their deplorable condition. I should be frightened at the prospect of being stung by any of the larger types of this group of insects. I have, however, known but a single instance of this kind. Several years ago a person was stung by a common black dirt dauber on the shoulder near the neck; he complained of numb-

ness in the part for a distance of some inches around the wound, but of no pain. Its effects lasted about twenty-four hours. I think it quite probable that the large Tarantula Killer would produce a more serious inconvenience, and perhaps paralyze the whole system. The



*Mygale Hentzii*, the Tarantula of Texas. From MARCY.

Pompilus, however, is a good-natured insect, showing no signs of pugnacity, except when she has a fine fat Tarantula in hand, and then she only threatens violence by spreading out her red wings, and running a little way

towards the intruder. She is quite tame, and will come familiarly in and about one's yard and house, dragging the prostrate Mygale under the floor, where she hides it from the intrusion of other Tarantula Killers, who would, if they could find it, take out the egg and put one of their own in its place, as they are remarkable for such thieving propensities.

The Mygale Hentzii, on the other hand, sometimes succeeds in capturing his great enemy, as I once noticed. When first observed, the Mygale had the Tarantula Killer, still alive, in his mouth, holding it by the back. The Tarantula seemed to be greatly elated at its success, which it manifested by capering about, and performing various other antics, such as running suddenly at any thing or person that came near it, holding on to his victim all the time. The Tarantula Killer appeared to be conscious of her condition, and was, as far as I could discern, fully resigned to her fate, remaining perfectly quiet. I regretted that I could not wait to witness the finale of this affair: such cases do not often occur.

The Tarantula Killers have severe fights with each other. It occasionally happens, when one of them succeeds in capturing a Tarantula, that another one, or more, flying around in that vicinity, and smelling the odor that arises from the Tarantula Killer when she uses her sting, which resembles the odor of the paper-making wasp (*Vespa*), only much stronger, takes the scent like a dog, tracks the Tarantula, following it up closely, and makes a violent effort to get possession of the paralyzed spider. A fight ensues, which occasionally terminates in the death of both parties; at other times the contest lasts but a little while, as the stronger party drives off the weaker, and takes possession of the prey.

It is surprising to one who has been educated to believe that the faculty of reason belongs alone to man, to contemplate the consummate ingenuity which is displayed by these insects in their efforts to secure their eggs from the observation of their own thieving sisters, and to hide the food they have provided for their young during the period of its existence under ground.

The Tarantula Killer feeds upon the honey and pollen of the flowers of the Elder, and of *Vitis ampelopsis*, the Virginia Creeper; but its favorite nourishment is taken from the blossoms of *Asclepias quadrifolium*. This species of *Asclepias* blooms through the summer, and the Tarantula Killer seems to know the locality of every plant. If one finds on the prairie a plant of *Asclepias quadrifolium* in bloom, and watches ten or fifteen minutes, he will be almost certain to see a Tarantula Killer come to it. This insect requires considerable food, as its period of life extends from the first of June until November, or till the frost destroys all the flowers, when it seems to die for want of food, as it is often seen at this time crawling about in a very feeble state. I do not think any of them ever survive the winter, as they never appear earlier than June.

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## THE BIRDS OF SPRING.

BY J. A. ALLEN.

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THE arrival of our birds during the spring is by no means uniform; a certain number coming one week and an equal number the next, either in the accession of species or individuals; nor is the increase regular and uninterrupted. At first the comers are uncertain, both as regards number and the time of arrival. The few that